

Brethren Evangelist

"I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life."—Jesus

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Municipal Ownership

In some large communities the question of municipal ownership of public utilities is demanding increasing attention, and it is not anticipating the truth to say that it has become one of the most significant, one of the most progressive problems of the hour. Municipal ownership marks the forefront of an advancing civilization, not so much because it is a tried and proved blessing, as because it promising to be an entering wedge to the solution of the overshadowing social problem, the problem of the masses, the problem of labor and poverty. It is neither our purpose nor our province to discuss it as a political or a social question, or a question of hopeful public policy. We mention it because in connection with the agitation of the subject, particularly in the city of Toledo, an exchange states that the Preachers' Union of that town has declared in favor of the municipal ownership of saloons. Here we certainly have an unique combination of ideas. It is argued in favor of public ownership of street railways, an indispensable utility, that the people would have better service and half fares, or perhaps free rides altogether; and in favor of public ownership of water that its cost to the citizen would be greatly reduced, and the same in regard to lights. The argument is sound provided a public administration of these enterprises could be kept free from corruption. The post office is cited continually as a standing argument in favor of public ownership of public utilities, giving the people infinitely better service at much lower rates than if it were in the hands of private capitalists and run for profit. But how shall we apply these arguments to the saloon which is an acknowledged public curse? If the municipality takes it out of private ownership, why should it not be destroyed? Do these Toledo preachers contemplate a reduction in the price of drinks as one of the results of municipal ownership? Will they help to run the thing? Will the Rev. Dr. Sobersides consent to serve on the Saloon Committee, sample the liquors to see if they are "pure," and regulate the price of drinks so that they shall easily come within reach of the humblest and poorest citizens? What else would there be for municipal ownership of the saloon to do? Perhaps they would weed out the low dives and doggeries, but is the guilded saloon any the less an agent of unmixed evil? Is it not the testimony of universal experience that the ornamental saloon, backed by its legal sanction, is more perilous to the

community than the more disreputable resorts? The Toledo preachers may be contemplating a shrewd piece of strategy. They may be aspiring to get control of the saloon business so as to close it up. May be they hope to lure the devil into a nice little trap, but we doubt very much that they will do it. He is an adept at the game of astute politics, and the first thing those preachers know he will have the last one of them in a ridiculous situation, and what could be more ridiculous than to see decorous clergymen actually running the saloons of the town, and superintending the whole damnable business of tempting and ruining the young men of their parishes.

The failure of the municipal ownership of the saloon will arise from the fact that, fix it as you may, the devil will continue to run the institution according to his own ideas. He may have no objections to having the preachers helping run it, but first and last, inside and out, it is his business, and he will be found right at the old stand in all his original iniquity. It is an impossible partnership, this compact between preachers and the devil in the saloon business. Let the brethren get together and grind their prohibition axes, pull off their long coats, and get down to business at the *root* of the tree. There can be no mistake about an attitude like that. Satan will know what it means, and the community will know what it means, and tho the effort may be supported by a discouraging minority, God will one day crown it with victory. However much he may be in the minority, the attitude of every Christian toward any and every form of wickedness, should be in perfect accord with what he conceives to be the ultimate triumph of righteousness.

What a unique spectacle it would have been for Christ to propose municipal control of the devil possessed in and about Jerusalem with a view of replenishing the treasury of the city government! His word to the unclean spirit was, "I command thee to come out of him," and at his word the devils came, and in one instance begged even the privilege of entering into the swine. No less radical treatment than this will ever settle the modern saloon problem. If the dignified preachers of Toledo have any inclination to court, hug, or otherwise control and manage the old Serpent with his poisonous fangs, they are welcome to the job. For our part we prefer Christ's remedy, precipitation, thru the swine, into the sea.